

State of the City 2007

Mayor Mark Mallory
City of Cincinnati
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Aronoff Center



Good evening. Thank you for gathering with me for the 2007 State of the City Address.

Thank you Jazmone for that wonderful introduction. I have chosen Jazmone to be the president of my Youth Council because she is extremely active in our community. Jazmone, thank you for being here tonight and for taking an active role in building a better future for Cincinnati. And by the way good luck in tonight's tournament. How about a round of applause for this remarkable young woman?

I also want to thank John Taylor, CEO of PNC Bank and the incoming Chair of the Cincinnati Business Committee, for serving as the Master of Ceremonies. Cincinnati has always been fortunate to have a corporate community that is actively engaged in improving our city. John, I look forward to working with you closely in the coming year.

Thank you, Rabbi Ingber, Imam Nashid, and Father Bramlage. May your prayers touch the hearts of our city and set the tone for the year ahead.

Officer Holtmann and Firefighter White, thank you for leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance, but more importantly thank you for your courageous acts of heroism, and thank you for your commitment to the City of Cincinnati.

And I also want to thank the wonderful staff of the Aronoff Center for the Arts. They have been extremely helpful in hosting us here tonight. The Aronoff Center is an anchor in the Cincinnati Arts and Cultural community. I attend a lot of performances here, and I encourage everyone here and everyone watching at home to enjoy what the Aronoff Center has to offer.

There are many distinguished guests here tonight that I want to recognize. First and foremost, I want to welcome the members of City Council. Working together, we have had a very successful year; and I am eager to continue our progress in 2007. Please stand and be recognized.

Council and I cannot do our work without a strong City Manager. And we have a great one. Ladies and gentleman, our City Manager, Milton Dohoney, Jr.

I also want to recognize Police Chief Tom Streicher, Fire Chief Robert Wright, and the Directors of all of our city departments. I appreciate your hard work and your dedication to the city.

All day, everyday, city employees work hard to provide the highest quality of services. And too often public employees are not recognized for their commitment to the citizens of Cincinnati. So, I can never say it enough: Thank you for all that you do to make this city great.

We are joined by the new President of the Hamilton County Commission Todd Portune, Commissioner Pat DeWine, and new Commissioner David Pepper.

I want to recognize members of the Ohio General Assembly. And of course, continuing in my family's proud tradition of public service, the newest member of the Hamilton County Delegation, my brother, State Representative Dale Mallory.

We have a variety of area Mayors with us tonight, including Mayor Callery of Covington, Mayor Guidugli of Newport, Mayor Seay of Lincoln Heights, and Mayor Smith of Silverton. Thank you for being here tonight.

We are also joined by former Mayor Bobbie Stern. Thank you for your continued commitment to this city.

And of course, my most important and honored guests, my personal role models and inspiration, my mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. William L. Mallory, Sr.

And lastly, I want to thank you, the citizens of Cincinnati. You have entrusted me with the immense honor of leading our great city during this important time in our history. Everyday, your trust guides me as I lead our city to a better and brighter future.

Ladies and gentlemen, I come before you tonight to report that Cincinnati is experiencing a rebirth. The state of our city is strong and growing stronger.

We are seeing the signs of progress in many areas of our community. There are neighborhoods that have new investment in housing and development, our downtown is growing, and for the first time in 50 years people are moving back into Cincinnati.

In last year's address, I laid out a series of clear initiatives to take our city in a new direction. We focused on addressing the key issues facing the city: public safety, youth, neighborhoods, the environment, economic development, creating partnerships, rebuilding our national reputation, and improving city government services. It has been a busy year, and I am proud to report that we have been successful in advancing our agenda.

We still face many challenges. And so our work to improve the city must continue.

Now, any discussion of the challenges that we face must begin with the issue of public safety. Much of the city's progress last year was overshadowed by the number of homicides.

Crime impacts every aspect of the city's growth and progress, and that's why it remains our number one priority. We will not allow the criminals to win. We will fight, and we must be united in that fight.

In January of last year, we implemented several strategies to improve public safety by launching a nine point safety initiative. And we saw success.

It began by calling on law abiding citizens to help solve crimes, and the response was overwhelming. Calls to CrimeStoppers increased dramatically, and those calls led to an increase in arrests.

You know, I often say that the fight against crime is a fight of “us” against “them.” And the “us” is the law abiding citizens and we must stand together in our fight against crime.

I am continually amazed and proud of the courage that our community shows in standing up against criminals. I want to recognize the community members in Avondale who adopted Operation Ceasefire as a response to gun violence.

We increased our efforts to remove drugs from our streets by targeting mid level drug dealers, and we aggressively used forfeiture and seizure laws to take their cars, to take their cash, and take their cocaine at record levels.

We asked the US Attorney office to prosecute more criminals in federal court. And they did, they even hired an additional federal prosecutor. We also targeted the 50 most wanted criminals, which led to the federal indictments of nine members of the Grimmie Gang, the most violent criminal network in the city.

We asked the media to help us target the most wanted criminals as well. The four area news stations all created a weekly segment to target wanted individuals. I want to say thank you to channels 5, 9, 12, and 19 for their leadership in the fight against crime.

We strengthened our relationships with other law enforcement agencies. We partnered with Sheriff Simon Leis to patrol Over-the-Rhine. We created a pilot program with the State Highway Patrol that led to a decrease in serious automobile accidents during the summer.

We increased our enforcement of the curfew and focused on truancy during the school year. We made more 1,000 curfew arrests and over 500 truancy arrests. Our message to kids is clear: when it is time to be at home, be at home, and when it is time to go to school, go to school.

We also put more police on the streets, 70 new police officers last year. We expanded the neighborhood walking patrols through the end of the year, and we created the Vortex Unit to target crime hot spots and aggressively pursue the worst criminals.

And while we have put forth additional strategies to help fight crime, improving the relationship between the police department and the community continues to be an on-going priority.

Last year, the Justice Department and the Federal Monitor agreed that the city is ahead of schedule in complying with the Memorandum of Agreement. While we are proud of that

achievement, we fully recognize that there is more work to be done and we remain committed to continuous improvement.

I have been talking to other Mayors and experts from around the country about how to improve public safety. Many of them have said “there is nothing you can do about your homicide rate.” I refuse to accept that kind of thinking. I won’t give up. We can’t give up.

That is why this year, we will continue the strategies that we have put into place, and we will also be implementing new approaches to further our progress.

I just told you that last year we hired 70 new officers. Over the next two years, we are going to hire 60 more. In addition, we are investing \$2.7 million dollars in the strategic deployment of our police officers.

Under the leadership of Dr. Victor Garcia of Children’s Hospital, and the Chairman of the Law and Public Safety Committee, Councilmember Cecil Thomas, Cincinnati will create a Youth Violence Intervention Initiative. This comprehensive community based approach to public safety is a partnership between the City of Cincinnati, Children’s Hospital, UC, law enforcement agencies, and community organizations. It’s being modeled after the work of Professor David Kennedy. A similar effort in Boston led to a dramatic reduction in violent crime and homicides.

I want to thank all of the members of Council for their commitment to getting this initiative off the ground.

Much of the gun violence that we see in our community is committed with illegal guns. We must take aggressive action to address this problem. Mayors from across the country are working together to take illegal guns off the streets. A coalition has been formed by Mayor Bloomberg of New York and Mayor Menino of Boston. They’ve asked me to join their coalition to share information and best practices in order to put an end to illegal gun trafficking.

But, instead of joining that group alone, I’ve asked other mayors from the Cincinnati area to join the coalition as well. And together, we will be the first group of Mayors to join this coalition as a region. And, doing so will send the strong message to criminals that we stand united in our fight against gun violence.

We will be working with the County Commissioners and Sheriff Leis to expand the sheriff patrols beyond Over-the-Rhine, into other areas of the city that are struggling with violent crime. We are also working with the County on the construction of a permanent Jail. Because it is clear that we need more jail space.

And to better coordinate law enforcement efforts in the region, I will be convening a Regional Safety Council to bring together the leadership of our law enforcement community. This standing committee will allow us to share information, increase opportunities for collaboration, and to develop additional strategies to get criminals off our streets.

All of the things that we have done in the area of public safety and all the things we plan to do; we do in the interests of keeping the public safe. Because every Cincinnati deserves to feel safe in their home, safe at school, safe at work, and safe in their neighborhood. Because every Cincinnati deserves to be able to enjoy all that Cincinnati has to offer without living in fear.

Let me be clear will continue to put every effort into the fight against those who want disrupt life in our community. We will stand united in the fight to ensure safety in our region.

Council and I are in complete agreement that public safety is our number one priority. That's why we invested so heavily in public safety in the budget.

Let me take a moment to thank City Council for their passion during the budget process. As Cincinnati leaders, how we allocate resources is how we set our priorities. I am extremely proud that we came together to speak with one voice, and we unanimously passed the budget.

Under the leadership of Finance Chair, Councilmember John Cranley, we were able to fund priorities that are vital to making our city strong. We kept open, all our recreation centers, all our neighborhood pools, and all our health centers. We invested in youth jobs and youth violence intervention. We increased human service funding to provide a safety net for our most vulnerable citizens. We are adding 60 new police officers and we are investing in additional police walking patrols.

We have invested in the areas that are priorities to strengthen and grow this city. We increased the city's savings account and we continued our strategy of aggressive investment in the retirement fund, all while trimming the size of our city workforce. All those efforts will continue to keep the city financially strong.

However, during the budget process, we did learn that the city could be facing some significant financial issues in the future, if we don't begin to make some difficult decisions now. It is expected in future years, that our expenditures will outpace our revenues. We must address that problem.

In order to keep our city strong financially, we must be smart and proactive. Therefore, I will appoint a special Task Force on City Finances, and will work with them to help us set the course for a strong financial future for our city. We have some of the greatest financial minds in the country right here in our city and I am going to enlist their help to take a close look at our financial structure and make recommendations about how we can meet our future challenges.

Last summer, I selected Milton Dohoney, Jr. to be our 14th City Manager. I was looking for someone who shared my vision of how city government should work. It was important that I brought in someone who would have a fresh perspective on how we operate here in Cincinnati.

The new City Manager has performed even better than I ever could have imagined. From the moment he started, he has been building relationships and he has been challenging managers and employees alike to refuse to settle, and instead, to reach for what is possible.

I should point out that Milton recently received his credentials from the International City Managers Association. He is the first City Manager to be credentialed while serving our city. Milton, I just want to say a special congratulations.

To meet the challenges of the 21st Century, we must ensure that our young people have every opportunity to be successful. With the right investments in our youth, we can challenge them to become productive citizens and responsible leaders.

Last year, I focused heavily on youth initiatives. I started by listening to students through the High School Listening Tour. I heard an earful, and one of thing I learned was that young people have a great passion for our city, and they want to help. So, I created a Youth Council to give students direct access to the Mayor's Office and to give them a role in shaping the future of our city.

Last year, we launched an exciting new initiative called Strive that will bring together all of the educational resources in our region to focus on the development of every child in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky from birth through college and into a meaningful career. Strive is a partnership between the education community, the business community, area non-profits, and the cities of Cincinnati, Covington, and Newport. This partnership recognizes the link between providing a strong education and creating a strong city.

I started a Mentoring Initiative to connect city employees to young people because mentoring has a dramatic positive effect on the lives of youth. I am a Mentor myself and I challenge more citizens to become mentors, as well. In fact, we have a city employee mentor with us here tonight, Amit Ghosh. He became a mentor in the pilot program held last summer, and has stuck with his mentee through some very trying time. Thank you Amit.

We expanded the summer food program because too many children go hungry in the summer when there is no school. We were so successful at expanding that program that the US Conference of Mayors asked us to present our strategy to Mayors from around the country. And we will continue our efforts because there is really no excuse for any child to go hungry in our city.

We held a Youth Job Fair, and 2,000 young people showed up looking for work. It was so big last year, that we are moving it to the Duke Energy Center this year. A lot of people in this city think that young people don't want to work, I challenge that – they do.

So, in my budget, I recommended a half million dollars for youth jobs. In the final budget, working with Councilmember Laketa Cole and others, we were able to increase that number to \$1.5 million for summer youth employment because young people are up to the challenge.

As part of that initiative, we are investing \$120,000 in a youth artist mural program, run by ArtWorks. The program will hire professional artists to train youth to become artists, and young people will be paid to create public murals to beautify our neighborhoods.

And neighborhoods are the real strength of our city.

Last year, Cincinnati grew through the development of several new projects across the city. We actively encouraged new housing construction by investing in infrastructure.

22 new town homes in Evanston; 60 new condos in Westwood; 53 new condos and 205 apartments in Corryville; 34 new homes in Columbia Tusculum; 32 new homes in Madisonville, and 26 condos in Over-the-Rhine. It is clear that people want to live in the City of Cincinnati.

We are also preserving the historic character of our city by investing \$3 million in Over-the-Rhine, along with over \$20 million more from 3CDC. Over 100 new units near the corner of 12th and Vine Street are expected to be complete and ready for occupancy by the spring. And the plan is to rehabilitate 100 units a year for the next 4 years.

But, new housing is not enough. In order to improve our aging housing stock, we also must invest in rehabilitating rental properties. That's why last year, our rental rehabilitation program helped to renovate 786 units of affordable rental housing.

We are also helping first time homebuyers with their downpayment. Last year, the American Dream Downpayment Initiative awarded grants to 43 families allowing them to buy homes in Cincinnati.

To further increase housing opportunities, we are creating a housing policy that will help us make strategic decisions to revitalize and grow our neighborhoods.

And we are already beginning to be more strategic in our approach to strengthening our neighborhoods. We recently opened the Focus Center to direct concentrated attention on Price Hill for 90 days. During that period, we will focus on building code enforcement, addressing crime hot spots, cleaning up streets, sidewalks, vacant lots, and beautifying landscapes to make Price Hill a more livable neighborhood.

This year, we are also going to be more strategic in how we address the demolition of condemned buildings. During the budget process, we dedicated a million dollars for demolition, and we are focusing on 3 neighborhoods that have high concentrations of condemned buildings: East Price Hill, Northside, and Avondale. By focusing our efforts, we will get rid of blight, we will eliminate crime hotspots, and we will create opportunity for future development.

While our neighborhoods are being transformed, there is no doubt that our downtown neighborhood is also undergoing a renaissance. Most people may not realize that Downtown is a neighborhood, but it is. And since the year 2000, the number of residents living in downtown has nearly doubled. There are over 200 condominiums currently under construction and 2,000 more are being proposed. Once again, the facts run counter to conventional thinking; people DO want to live downtown.

The residential resurgence in downtown is being complemented by renewed public and private investment. Downtown is the economic engine for the region.

The newly renovated Fountain Square is the catalyst for additional investment throughout downtown. Here are some examples:

McCormick & Schmick's Restaurant opened at the corner of Fifth and Vine. The remodeling of 525 Vine Street was completed with new retail space on the ground floor. Fifth Third Bank is renovating their retail space and completely redesigning the exterior of their building. The 580 Building on Walnut Street is also adding new street level retail opportunities.

In the coming year, downtown will welcome several new restaurants. Just last weekend, Sully's Saloon opened on the corner of 7th and Race. A new restaurant is being built directly on Fountain Square. And discussions are underway to open as many as 5 new restaurants this year.

Last fall, we reopened the new and completely redesigned, public transportation hub, Government Square on Fifth Street, making it easier to come downtown for work, shopping, and entertainment.

In June, we reopened our renovated and expanded Duke Energy Center. The new convention center will allow Cincinnati to compete for 75% of the nation's convention business. That will bring in thousands more conventioners each year, and with them millions of dollars in spending. This will also give us an opportunity to showcase our city.

Speaking of conventions, last fall, after an intensive and lengthy process, the NAACP selected Cincinnati over Las Vegas to host their 2008 national convention. Hosting that convention gives us an opportunity to highlight the progress that the city has made at a national level.

Last year, the city and the county made significant progress on the banks development. With the help of Councilmembers Berding and Bortz, we created the Banks Working Group, which has selected a world class developer and has entered into exclusive negotiations. Those negotiations will take time, but I am confident that we will reach an agreement that will allow the Banks Project to move forward.

I said it last year and I will say it again, I will not agree to a deal on the Banks that does not have a strong workforce development and minority inclusion plan.

And while, we are working on the Banks, we are also investing in economic development projects in other areas of the city.

In College Hill, we made way for the development of condominiums and retail space, a \$24 million dollar project. In Linwood, construction is underway on three new office buildings for small businesses on Wooster Pike. In Bond Hill, we are preparing a 3-acre site for the development of several high tech research facilities to bring jobs to the area. In Evanston, ground was broken on the \$100 million dollar Keystone Parke Development, which will produce as many as 2,000 new jobs.

I want to take a moment to recognize Chris Rose the president of new Rookwood Pottery in Cincinnati. Rookwood Pottery was the first female owned manufacturing company in the

country. It was the first company to merge art and commerce successfully. I want to thank Chris Rose and his team for rebuilding this part of Cincinnati's history. Chris please stand.

And while we are on the subject of our city's heritage, I think it is important to maintain Cincinnati's historic architectural heritage. And I have asked, the Vice Mayor Jim Tarbell, to take the lead on this issue. Jim is a custodian of Cincinnati history and a true champion of the effort to preserve Cincinnati's historic character. Jim, thank you for your passion.

We made economic development a cornerstone in the city budget. The City Manager created a \$3 million dollar economic development fund to invest in new projects and spur economic development throughout the city. He has also been conducting a nationwide search for a new economic development director. We are making the commitment to running a world-class economic development operation.

We are also recreating the Department of City Planning. Last year, I put together a group of planning professionals to help us design the new department. This year, we will be hiring a new director who will build the department from the ground up. It is time that we put Cincinnati back on the map as a leader in the area of city planning.

We must ensure that economic development opportunity is shared in all Cincinnati communities. We are going to challenge the notion that some neighborhoods cannot support more business investment. There is an organization called Social Compact, and they have selected Cincinnati for a statistical analysis of the buying power in our neighborhoods. They have made Cincinnati their number one priority because of our potential for investment. We will be using their data to spur investment and bring key services such as banks, grocery stores, and other retail into underserved neighborhoods all across our city.

In order to compete both for the jobs of the 21st Century, and the residents who are going to work those jobs, we need to have a modern and dependable system of public transportation.

Under the leadership of Councilmember Chris Bortz, we are conducting a Streetcar feasibility study that will set us on the course to bring a modern streetcar system to Cincinnati. It will improve mobility throughout downtown to make our central core more livable, workable and vibrant.

I have also engaged in a conversation with area leaders on how to implement what I am calling the Cadillac Plan for Public Transportation. That plan will revolutionize our system of public transit for the 21st Century. It will complement our current system with a new network of express routes, cross connections, and neighborhood transit hubs.

In order to strengthen and grow our city, our transportation system needs to better satisfy the needs of employers and employees. The conventional thinking in Cincinnati has been that public transportation is for those who don't have any other option. In other modern cities, all types of citizens rely on public transportation as their primary method of getting around.

If this system is done right, it won't just move people from one place to another, it will create economic development opportunities all over the region. So, it's time to embrace big ideas to change our city.

Last year, my office created the Young Professional Kitchen Cabinet to help develop strategies to attract and retain young professionals. They are an energetic and passionate group, and they are already working on all types of ideas.

In fact, my office is about to launch one of their ideas. The Young Professionals Kitchen Cabinet with the help of the Youth Council and Rumpke will be running a pilot recycling program in 6 Cincinnati Public Schools. Recycling containers are being delivered this week, and the students will be competing to see which school can recycle the most.

Let me take a moment to recognize the members the Youth Council and the Young Professionals Kitchen Cabinet who are here tonight, please stand up. Let's give them a round of applause for taking a leadership role in the future of Cincinnati.

We're doing this because great cities take responsibility for their environmental problems and I know that Cincinnati is a great City. For that reason, I have worked to reverse policies that eliminated environmental oversight and ignored chronic environmental problems.

Last year, we engaged business and community stakeholders to reestablish the Office of Environmental Quality and I want to thank Councilmember David Crowley for taking the lead on that initiative.

We launched the Cincinnati Green Initiative through the Parks Department which has installed solar trash-compactors to reduce collection costs in various city parks. We also increased our usage of Biodiesel fuel in our mowing equipment. And we are now in the process of installing solar panels and a wind turbine to reduce energy usage at the Parks Administration Building in Eden Park.

We have begun to tackle the issue of lead in our communities. I want to take a minute to thank Sharon Coolidge of the Cincinnati Enquirer for her series of articles that helped us refocus our attention on this most important matter. In response to those articles, I asked Councilmember Chris Monzel, Chair of the Education and Health Committee, to take a leadership role in developing a new policy to address the problem of lead paint.

Tonight, I have been talking about a lot of issues; I have talked about what happened last year and what we are going to do this year. But more important than that, I have put forth the principle that we must challenge the conventional way of thinking. And changing the way we think will help our city grow stronger.

So when someone says that we cannot do anything to reduce homicides, we have to challenge that notion, that's why we're implementing the Youth Violence Intervention Initiative to make our city safer.

We have to challenge the conventional thinking that Cincinnati's young people don't want to work. Well 2,000 young people showed up to our job fair looking for work, and that's why it's so important to invest a million and a half dollars in Youth Jobs this year.

We have to challenge the notion that there is no buying power in certain neighborhoods, so that's why we're working with Social Compact to prove otherwise.

And who says that public transportation is just about moving poor people from their homes to their jobs, that's why it's so important to implement the Cadillac Plan for Public Transportation, so that our system becomes an economic development driver.

And, who says that people are leaving Cincinnati. Well the US Census said that last June. They said that Cincinnati was losing population faster any other major city in the nation. But, we proved them wrong.

With all the new development over the last several years, it just didn't add up. So, we challenged the census. And we showed them the evidence that our community was growing, we showed them the building permits, we showed them the certificates of occupancy, we told them about all of the new housing that had come online, and we won that challenge.

And in the process, we were reminded about the importance of challenging conventional thinking. We simply can't accept things the way they are. We have to actively seek change in our community.

So as we come together tonight to reflect on the state of our community. I am telling you that we have the power to change the state of our city. We did it last year. And, we can make it even stronger. What will really transform our city is a change in our attitude; it is time to display our pride in Cincinnati once again.

I love this city: from the rich heritage of our river to the beautiful rolling hills; from the great architecture to our world renowned institutions of arts, culture, medicine, education, and business; from our unique neighborhoods to our greatest asset: the people of Cincinnati.

I know that by working together, we have the power to tackle the challenges of the future and live up to our full potential.

Thank you joining me tonight and God Bless the City of Cincinnati.